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ABSTRACT

This paper describes how freshman composition teachers can provide students with tools for integrating different classes and navigating the university experience by introducing students to discourse community theory and viewing freshman composition as a foundation for Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC). It begins by describing how discourse community theory helped students in one course to make connections between communities and fields of knowledge. It then presents the handout "Tour through the WAC Elements of our Freshman English Course" and associated detailed handouts describing the parts of one instructor's curriculum which teaches discourse community theory and supports WAC. (EF)

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Navigating this New Terrain: Composing a Course through the University.

by Michelle Cox

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CS 217 501

Navigating this New Terrain: Composing a Course through the University

Freshmen often feel overwhelmed in large university settings. In their first year, these students are often housed in the largest residence halls on campus, and are often placed in courses taught in large lecture halls. Freshman composition, as one of the only small-classroom settings during the first year, is in a position to help students navigate the potentially alienating terrain of the university. Vincent Tinto, a student development theorist, observes that students often experience courses as "detached, individual units," saying, "One course in separated from another in both content and peer group, one set of understandings unrelated in any intentional fashion to what is learned in other courses. Though there are majors, there is little academic or social coherence to student learning" (82)[1]. As Freshman composition teachers, we can provide students with tools they need to find their way through this new terrain by introducing students to discourse community theory and viewing Freshman composition as a foundation for Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC).

At the University of New Hampshire, where I teach, the WAC program is well established. With initiatives dating as far back as 1985, the WAC program has established many Writing Intensive (WI) Courses in each department, workshops and lectures for faculty across the curriculum on how to use writing in their courses, workshops for students within classrooms across the curriculum, workshops on computer-assisted writing, learning communities, service learning programs, and writing fellow programs for many departments, such as the Thomas School of Business and

[1] Tinto, Vincent. "Linking Learning and Leaving: Exploring the Role of the College Classroom in Student Departure." Reworking the Departure Puzzle. Ed. John M. Braxton. Nashville: Vanderbilt U P, 2000.

Nutrition Science Department[2]. Students experience WAC as soon as their freshman year through the WI requirement. Before graduating, all undergraduate students must complete four WI courses "which must include English 401, Freshmen Composition, and three additional 'writing-intensive' courses, one of which must be in the student's major, and one of which must be at the 600-level or above"[3]. A WI course must meet the guidelines established by the University Writing Requirement, which states:

> As the cornerstone of any higher education, academic and disciplinary literacy is the concern of the entire faculty and the whole University curriculum. Understanding that literacy is a long-term development process, the University community is committed to the following goals for student writing and learning:
> A. Students should use writing as an intellectual process to learn material, to discover, construct, and order meaning.
> B. Students should learn to write effectively in various academic and disciplinary genres for professional and lay audiences.
> C. Students should learn to display competence with the generic features and conventions of academic language.

Using Freshman English as a foundation for WAC would help prepare students to navigate the writing conventions and discourse conventions of both WI and non-WI courses they will take during their course of studies at UNH. A 15-week Freshman English course would never be able to give students practice in all of the "various academic and disciplinary genres," but, by introducing theories that are foundational to WAC, such as discourse community theory, students would have the conceptual tools they need to enter and operate in various academic and, ultimately, professional, communities.

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[2] See "Development of University Writing Requirement" (http://www.unh.edu/writing/wihistory.html) to read more about the history of WAC at UNH.

[3] See "University Writing Requirements for Undergraduates" (http://unhinfo.unh.edu/registrar/writ/writ.html) to read more about the writing requirements at UNH.

Student Voices

When I began teaching Freshman English three years ago, I focused my course around personal narrative and creative nonfiction, which I found problematic. I was only engaging about a fifth of the students in the classroom, the fifth that majored in the Humanities and were interested in the types of writing I was teaching before they entered my classroom. The rest of the students seemed to feel excluded. They did not have any interest in writing personally or creatively, and could not see how these ways of writing connected to their majors—either the ways they would be writing for their majors, or the ways knowledge in constructed and valued in their majors. Now that I discuss discourse community theory (and teach multiple genres of writing), many more students are engaged—and feel included—in the classroom. The following quotes are taken from Spring 2001 midterm portfolios of students who are not majoring in the Humanities:

"Both the improvements in my reading and writing skills are further enhanced with the knowledge of discourse communities. This knowledge first allows me to recognize the reasons behind my writing styles, and helps me understand why I write the way I write. Secondly, this knowledge allows me to understand authors whose discourse communities might differ dramatically from my own. Then, with the knowledge of discourse communities, the understanding of my own writing and all other writing increases dramatically."

"Talking about different discourse communities and realizing how many different worlds every person is part of was a revelation . . . As we explored the variety of discourse communities and languages and their relationships, I became more aware of them in what I read and what I wrote. I definitely think that this realization and exploration has allowed me to become more aware and accepting of new ideas, opinions, traditions, mannerisms, languages, and connections between communities that suddenly appeared everywhere . . . [I now see] an overwhelming and intricate connection throughout the communities I have come to know this semester." She then goes on to make connections between the discourse practices of four communities she is a part of: the horseback riding community, her family community, a biology class she's taking, and Freshman Composition.

"Within English 401H, many of the ideas from my freewrites, one-pagers [reader responses], and essays were interconnected. For example, I used a freewrite to get

inspiration for my argument essay, and my one-pager readings often brought up ideas that ended up in my freewrites the next class. Connections also occurred between my college classes. Ideas from other courses often popped up in freewrites, and the third one-pager in my portfolio describes my experiences with language and background assumptions in multiple classes. I've also used my discoveries about my writing and reading processes to improve my writing and reading in all of my classes. Working on the last section of my portfolio ["Making Connections"] made me aware that I can connect the concepts and ideas from English 401H not just to other courses, but across all of the discourse communities in my life."

All of these students emphasize how their knowledge of discourse communities helps them to makes connections between both communities and fields of knowledge, which can only serve to enrich their learning experience.

The following pieces are handouts I distributed during the CCCC presentation. The first piece, "A Tour through the WAC Elements of our Freshman English Course," describes the parts of my curriculum that teach students discourse community theory or support the course as a foundation for WAC. It is important to note that the construction of this course was not a sole effort, but was the result of collaboration. Katherine Tirabassi and I collaborated on writing the syllabus, weekly schedule, and handouts, thought we still develop lesson plans individually, and teach according to our own teaching styles. The rest of the pieces (pp 6-12) are handouts that both Kate and I give to our Freshman English students. These pieces are contextualized in "A Tour through the WAC Elements of our Freshman English Course."

A Tour through the WAC Elements of our Freshman English Course

1. **Introduction in syllabus:** In the course description, students are told that they will be examining writing from various disciplines: "Since writing, reading, and research are not confined to English classes, we will be continuously comparing the approaches to writing, reading, and research we use in Freshman English to the approaches we use in other sites, in both our academic and our personal lives."
2. **Extra credit option:** For extra credit, students can go to the Connors Writing Center for a consultation. They can conference on writing from Freshman English or any other course they are taking. Two points are added to the final grade for each consultation (limit of three).
3. **One-pager:** For each set of assigned readings, students write a one-pager in response. A one-pager is a single-spaced one-page piece of writing where students make connections between the readings, to past readings, to experiences in other classes, and to experiences from their personal lives (see handout).
4. **The Broomstick Projects:** These projects, entitled, "Bring-Me-the-Broomstick" (due at midterm) and Broomstick II (due at the end of the semester) help students explore their (tentative) majors or fields of interest. (See handouts.)
5. **Discourse Community Theory:** During the first two weeks of the semester, students are introduced to discourse community theory through readings, class discussions, and class activities:
    i. Readings: Students read Gary Layne Hatch's "Communities and Conversation" (from Arguing in Communities 2nd ed.), Perri Klass's "Learning the Language," and Amy Tan's "Mother Tongue" (both widely anthologized).
    ii. Class discussions: Students discuss what they see when they envision a writer, writing as an art vs. writing as a science (craft), and how "good writing" is not a universal value or an individual preference, but, as Charles Bazerman defines the term in Constructing Experience, "good writing" is "more usefully thought of as situationally effective writing" (23). Students discuss discourse communities using "Understanding Discourse Communities" handout (attached).
    iii. Class activities: Students brainstorm a list of their discourse communities and use this list to create a Discourse Community Map, which is a visual activity (see handout).

    At the end of this sequence, students are introduced to the first essay assignment, which is a personal narrative about an event in their literacy history. Students may write about a literacy experience that involves writing, reading, or research within any discipline or discourse community.
6. **Portfolio Sections:** In both the midterm and final portfolios, students devote a section to "Making Connections Across Discourse Communities." In these sections, students analyze the ways they speak, read, write, and conduct research by comparing and contrasting the Freshman Composition discourse community with other discourse communities that they participate in (which can be academic, professional, or personal), by referring to three artifacts (such as papers they've written for other classes or a letter from a friend) that they include in that section.

The One-Pager

This assignment is a way for you to be involved in a "conversation" with the writers that we will be reading throughout the semester. While you are reading, mark up the text. Underline key passages, and jot down your observations and questions about the text. Refer back to these notes as you write a response to the reading (at least one page long, double-spaced). Your response can include:

- Connections you see between these readings and other readings you've done for this class.
- Connections you see between these readings and our class discussions.
- Personal experiences that connect to the readings.
- Concepts or experiences from other courses you are taking that connect to the readings.

A one-pager is not a collection of notes or a summary of the readings. Rather, a one-pager is your space to synthesize the concepts within the readings. For some reading assignments, I may ask you particular questions to address in your response.

We will be using these one-pagers to start off our class discussions. You will not need to read directly from the response, but only to talk from what you've written. I will collect these one-pagers at the end of each class, check them off, and return them to you with comments. You will be choosing from these one-pagers for your final portfolio to highlight discoveries made this semester.

Evaluation of One-Pagers:

One-pagers will not be individually graded, but they do contribute to the homework portion your final grade (15%). You cannot get credit for late one-pagers. However, if you are absent, you can hand in your reading response during the following class meeting. If the reading response is not at least a full page long, you will not credit for the assignment.

Save All of Your One-Pagers:

1. You never know which one-pagers you'll want to use for your final portfolio.
2. At times, I'll be asking you to re-read your one-pagers to see what new connections you can make, and what questions you've been raising throughout the semester.
3. I will keep careful record of your one-pagers, but it would be prudent of you to hold onto the one-pagers in case you think I've made a mistake in my records. To make it easier for each of us to track your one-pagers, please include your name, the due date from your weekly schedule, and the title(s) of the reading(s) at the top of the page.

* This handout was developed by Katherine Tirabassi and Michelle Cox, and then adapted by Michelle Cox.

Bring-me-the-Broomstick Project

Research is a significant component of Freshman English, as it is in every major. The purpose of this assignment is tri-fold: (1) you will become more familiar with the university library system, (2) you will be able to explore various facets of your major, and (3) you will be able to refer back to this project as you conduct future research in your major.

The great and powerful Oz (me!) would like you to bring her the following "broomsticks":

1. Tell me your (tentative) major or field of interest. If you have not chosen your major yet, choose one possible major you are interested in exploring for this project.
2. Tell me the range of call numbers of the areas of the library your major or field would most often take you (for example, the range for composition is PE 1404 to PE 1408). You can find these call numbers by looking in the Subject Heading Guides in the reference section of the Dimond Library.
3. List five recently published reference works (found in the Reference Department of the library) relevant to your major or field, each with a full bibliographic citation in proper MLA format (refer to St. Martin's Handbook, 516-563), and a short paragraph telling me how this source could be useful to your academic work.
4. Find a writing guide that is geared toward students in your major. Give a full bibliographic citation in proper MLA format and photocopy the table of contents. You can find writing guides for most majors in the Connors Writing Center.
5. Tell me the name of an online database or index available through the UNH library computer system that can help you conduct research in your major or field. Use this online database or index to conduct a search on a specific topic in your field (for example, if your field were English, you could use the MLA index and search with the term "Alice Walker"). Then, print out one page of the search results. You can find a list of online databases and indexes in the English 401 handbook, or by going to http://www.library.unh.edu/tools.

Make sure that all reference works that you choose are **current** reference works (sources that will contain up-to-date information and that will be useful when you do future research). Also, make sure that you attach all photocopied materials, as they are an important part of this project. You can hand in this assignment any time before midterm.

To complete this assignment, you may visit any of the UNH library branches, which include Dimond Library (main library), Kendall Hall (Biological Sciences), Parsons Hall (Chemistry), DeMeritt Hall (Physics), and Kingsbury Hall (Engineering, Mathematics & Computer Science).

* This exercise was first developed by John Ernest, Professor of African American Literature at the University of New Hampshire. This handout was developed by both Michelle Cox and Katherine Tirabassi.

Broomstick Two

College is, of course, a large interpretive community. Various smaller communities exist within it called disciplines—English, history, business, art, and so on. Within any discipline there are established ways of interpreting texts. Often when you write an interpretive essay, you will do so from the perspective of a traditional academic interpretive community. Take care to follow the conventions of that community (135).

Toby Fulwiler and Alan R. Hayakawa. The Blair Handbook, Third Edition.

For this assignment, you will be extending the research that you began in the Bring Me the Broomstick Project. Each of the following options are designed to help you focus in on a certain aspect of your major, and to help you think through the decisions you are making about your major. To complete this assignment, **choose one** of the eight options below, collect and include all **artifacts, research notes, and/or interview/survey questions and notes**, and write a **two-page letter** reflecting on what you have discovered about your major from this experience.

Please note: your cover letter should answer the questions within the option that you chose as well as introduce the artifacts and notes that you include.

1. **Investigating Writing in Your Major:** Locate and photocopy an article published within a scholarly journal related to your major or field of interest. Use the following questions to analyze the language and structure of the article: How does the writer establish his/her credentials? How does the author use primary and secondary sources? How are quotations used and integrated into the text? Does the writer use first person (I) or prefer terms such as *one* or *the investigator*? What is the effect of this stylistic choice? In general, how long are the sentences? How long are the paragraphs? Are verbs generally active or passive and why? What bibliographical style (such as MLA, APA, CBE, or Chicago) are used? Choose one word in the article that is particular to this discipline and investigate its meaning.

2. **Club Meeting:** Attend a meeting of a club that is connected to your major. Describe your experience entering a new discourse community. How would you characterize the discourse of the meeting? Who spoke and who didn't and why? How was the meeting conducted - parliamentary procedure, informal discussion? What club activities do the members engage in and why? How did the group respond to your presence? As a newcomer to the organization, how did you feel entering that discourse community? What language would you need to learn in order to become part of the community (i.e. what moments during the meeting didn't you have access to because of the common discourse of the group)?

3. **Attend a Reading or a Lecture:** Attend a reading or a lecture sponsored by your major's department. Take notes. Describe your experience entering a new discourse community. How did you hear about the lecture (advertisement, flyer, e-mail notification, word of mouth)? Who is the speaker and how is he/she introduced? How are the speaker's credentials established? How does the speaker employ ethos, pathos, or logos? What topic is being discussed? What questions (if any) are asked after the reading/lecture? How would you characterize the discourse of the reading/lecture (formal, informal, academic)? What discourse do you understand? What discourse didn't you understand? What audience is the reading/lecture directed towards? Were visuals or other forms of media used? What surprised you about the reading or lecture?

4. **Getting Advice:** Make an appointment with a counselor at Career Services. Discuss your major or areas of interest with the counselor. Find out what potential career paths this major could lead to. Discuss the various paths you can choose during your course of study here at UNH which could help you explore facets of your major (courses, internships, service opportunities, campus jobs, research opportunities, summer jobs/programs). Use the Career Services library and choose one of the following to explore in-depth: a text about potential jobs in your major, job announcement binders, graduate school opportunities in your major.

5. **Views from Outside the Discipline:** Do a survey of at least ten students (five male and five female) that have a different major from your own. The purpose of this survey is to discover outside impressions of your discipline. Ask questions about how the students perceive the workload of this major, potential career opportunities, difficulty of the major, etc. Ask the students where their impressions came from (observing students in that major, looking through the UNH catalog, film/tv, etc.) Collect the data, tabulate the results (ex. Four out of ten students answered NO to question #2) and compare the students' impressions to your own knowledge of the major. What surprised you about certain responses? What responses confirmed/differed from what you know about your major?

6. **Talk to Someone who Knows:** Interview an upperclassman in your discipline. Ask the following questions: When and why did he/she choose this major? How much writing has this person done in courses related to this major? What forms does this writing usually take? How does the amount of writing in writing intensive classes in the major differ from regular courses? What do people who major in this field tend to do as a career? Who are some of the leaders in the discipline? What are some of the disagreements in the field? What does he/she know about what research professors in this field do? How is the field changing?

7. **Talk to Someone who Knows Even More:** Interview a graduate student, professor, or professional in your chosen major/field. Ask the following questions: What are the hot topics in this discipline? What do graduates of this major tend to do as a career? (If you are interviewing a professional, ask what life looks like on the job, i.e. a day in the life of a ____). How important is writing in your discipline? Where would one find examples of good writing? When students first come into your discipline, (or, for a professional, when recent graduates enter the work force) what difficulties are they apt to have in handling its discourse (writing, reading, speaking, or researching)?

8. **What's the Buzz:** Most disciplines have electronic discussion list in which professionals talk about hot topics in the field. Choose one of these discussion lists to subscribe to. Make sure that the list you choose is an active list in the field. Read the entries that spark your interest. Then write about the discourse that you read. How do people address one another? What are the types of questions that people ask? What are the responses like? Think about how discussion lists can help professionals in the field conduct their own research and work. To find a discussion list related to your major/field of interest, ask a professor in that field what sites they use or see The Directory of Scholarly and Professional E-conferences: www.n2h2.com/KOVACS.

* This handout was adapted from "Exploring the Discourse of Your Major" in Mike Rose and Malcolm Kiniry's Critical Strategies for Academic Thinking and Writing across the Curriculum 3rd Ed. (676-84).

UNDERSTANDING DISCOURSE COMMUNITIES

1) *When several (or more) readers share a background, common values, and a common language, they may be considered a* discourse community. . . . *all the words, all the languages we understand (including the nonverbal communication of body language and social conventions), invariably influence how we write.*

--Lynn Z. Bloom, The Essay Connection (5)

2) *How you read and interpret a text depends upon who you are. Who you are depends upon the influences that have shaped you—the communities to which you belong. All of us belong to many communities: families, social and economic groups (students or teachers, middle or working class), organizations (Brownies, Boy Scouts, Democrats, Masons), geographic locales (rural or urban, North or South), and institutions (school, church, fraternity). Your membership in one or more communities determines how you see and respond to the world. . . .*

The communities that influence you most strongly are called interpretive communities; *they influence the meaning you make of the world. People who belong to the same community that you do are likely to have similar assumptions and therefore likely to interpret things as you would.*

--Toby Fulwiler, The Working Writer (163)

3) *People's literacies and language use reflect their different sets of memberships in society. . . . The fact that uses of language enact and change memberships is increasingly visible in public and academic forums . . . most people are partly in and partly out of any social or school groups in which they find themselves. Most people need to pretend to some extent in order to seem to belong. To understand that one reads and writes through and for membership is to transform language use from a highly individualized activity of self-regulation and self-enhancement to one less clear in method but more familiar in purpose: finding interests in common with readers, authors, and cultures different from ourselves, and identifying the membership, as well as the individual identity, of all. To study language use and literacy in this way is to reduce the need for pretending, and to increase the effort of identifying oneself in multiple senses.*

--David Bleich, Know and Tell: A Writing Pedagogy of Disclosure, Genre, and Membership (53-55)

4) *Recently, my husband has become very active in a recreational discourse community, the international community of cyclists . . . like most other communities, cycling has experts, some of whom write articles for the magazines to which he subscribes, using a register that is mysterious to the uninitiated: "unified rear triangle"; "metal matrix composite." Cyclists share values (good health, travel interests), special knowledge, vocabulary, and genres, but they do not necessarily share political or social views, as my husband discovered when conversing with other cyclists on a group trip . . .*

As this discussion indicates, individuals often affiliate with several communities at the same time, with varying levels of involvement and interest. People may join a

group because they agree politically, because they want to socialize, or because they are interested in a particular sport or pastime. The depth of an individual's commitment can, and often does, change over time. As members come and go, the genres and practices continue to evolve, reflecting and promoting the active members' aims, interests, and controversies.

--Ann M. Johns, Text, Role, and Context: Developing Academic Literacies (54)

5) *Baseball writers address a discourse community that knows a lot about baseball and is familiar with the language used to describe the game. They use what readers know (here the rules and language of the game) to report something new (how the game came out last night).*

What discourse community are you addressing when you write? That is, what do your readers already know that you do not have to tell them? These questions have no easy answers. But you must consider them with every sentence that you write.

--Richard Marius, A Writer's Companion, Fourth Edition (4).

6) *Before the advent of the modern university in the 1870's, academia was indeed a single discourse community. Institutions of higher learning built an intellectual and social community by selecting students primarily on the basis of social class (less than 1 percent of the population was admitted), which guaranteed linguistic homogeneity, and by initiating them intellectually through a series of highly language-dependent methods--the traditional recitation, disputation, debate, and oral examination of the old liberal curriculum. Equally important, most students shared common values (Christian, often sectarian) with their teachers (primarily ministers). They pursued a uniform course of study were then duly welcomed as full members of the nation's governing elite.*

--David R. Russell, "Academic Discourse: Community or Communities?" Critical Strategies for Academic Thinking and Writing, 3rd Edition (698-99).

7) *I was a listening child, careful to hear the very different sounds of Spanish and English. Wide-eyed with hearing, I'd listen to sounds more than words. First there were English (gringo) sounds. So many words were still unknown that when the butcher or the lady at the drugstore said something to me, exotic polysyllabic words would bloom in the midst of their sentences. Often, the speech of people in public seemed to me very loud, booming with confidence. The man behind the counter would literally ask, "What can I do for you!" But by being so firm and so clear, the sound of his voice said that he was a gringo; he belonged in public society . . . But then there was Spanish. Espanol: my family's language. Espanol: the language that seemed to me a private language. I'd hear strangers on the radio and in the Mexican-Catholic church across town speaking in Spanish, but I couldn't really believe that Spanish was a public language, like English. Spanish speakers, rather, seemed related to me, for I sensed that we shared—through our language—the experience of feeling apart from los gringos.*

--Richard Rodriguez, The Hunger of Memory

* This handout was developed by both Michelle Cox and Katherine Tirabassi.

Discourse Communities Map

This exercise will allow you to visually represent the discourse communities that influence the ways you think, speak, write, read, identify yourself, and interpret the world around you.

In this visual representation, you could:

- Depict discourse communities from your past, your present, and/or your future.
- Use imagery, symbols, colors, and/or words to represent certain discourse communities.
- Use a landscape (trees, mountains, ocean) to represent the "landscape" of your discourse communities.
- Use map imagery (roads, signs, houses) to represent your journey in, out, through, near, toward, between, around, among, across various discourse communities.
- Think about what discourse communities act as your interpretive communities and how these communities stand in relation to each other (do they overlap? clash? blend? do they have walls between them? bridges? gaps? silences? prejudices? paths?).
- Think of a metaphor that could represent your discourse communities (house with windows, table with plates of food, bookshelf, playground, objects that hold meaning for you).

Don't worry about your artistic abilities! We will be using these maps to discover how we negotiate between our various discourse communities. Drafting visuals can contribute to our thinking and writing processes. In this case, the visual could help you brainstorm for the first draft of your Literacy History essay.

* This exercise was first developed by Cinthia Gannett, Professor of Composition and Director of both WAC and the Connors Writing Center at the University of New Hampshire. This handout was developed by both Michelle Cox and Katherine Tirabassi.